

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH
OF
JOHN THE BAPTIST

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A biographical sketch of John the

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A

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

OF

JOHN THE BAPTIST.

ALSO,

A BRIEF ANALYSIS

OF THE

DOCTRINE OF BAPTISM,

IN TWO CHAPTERS:

By **CHRISTIAN LAYMAN.**

I have need to be baptized of thee. Matt. iii. 14.

And did all drink the same spiritual drink: (For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them and that Rock was Christ.) I. Corinth. x. 4.

For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. I. Corinth. xii. 13.

Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him, shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting Life. John iv. 14.

BURLINGTON, N. J.

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1821.



CHAPTER I.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

OF

JOHN THE BAPTIST.

It appears from the accounts in the **New Testament** of this distinguished Herald of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, that he was the son of a Priest named Zacharias, and Elizabeth his wife, in their advanced age.

“An angel of the Lord appeared unto Zacharias standing on the right side of the altar of incense, and told him, Thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elizabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. And thou shalt have joy and gladness, and many shall rejoice at his birth. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother’s womb. And many of the children of Israel shall be turned to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the Fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” Luke i. 11, 17.

Accordingly, we find that this prophecy of the angel was fulfilled, and the eighth day they came to circumcise the child and named him John. And his Father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying, "And thou child shalt be called the Prophet of the Highest, for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his way; to give knowledge of Salvation unto his People, by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the Day-spring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death; to guide our feet into the way of peace. And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his showing unto Israel."

Here I would call the attention of the reader to the fact, that neither in the prophecy of the angel, nor of Zacharias above quoted, is there any intimation that John should receive a divine commission to baptize with water; and what is further remarkable, although we have a particular account of his being circumcised the eighth day, when he received his name; yet not a word is said of his having been baptized with water, then, or at any other time; neither by sprinkling and crossing with water, nor by immersion in water.

Therefore, Roman Catholicks, Episcopalians, Presbyterians and Baptists, are spared the trouble of learned disquisition in splitting hairs, relative to the precise mode in which John the Baptist was himself baptized with water.

I have lately received a Pamphlet written by John

Ryland D. D. which asserts, that “**Christian Baptism** “ is neither more nor less than an immersion of the whole “ body in water, solemnly performed in the name of “ the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. John professed to act by a divine commission. His mission had been predicted by Isaiah the Prophet.”

The author of this pamphlet has however, totally omitted the transcript of both the profession and the prediction, I will therefore insert them here. **John i. 23.** “ I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord, as said the Prophet **Esaias.**”

Isa. xl. 3. “ The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the Desert a high way for our God.”

The reader will perceive, that **Isaiah** and **John** perfectly agree in pointing out the Office and Commission of the Forerunner or Herald of our Saviour; but neither of them name water baptism as any part of it. Therefore, the Priests and Levites enquired of him, **Why baptizest thou then?** John answered them, saying, **I baptize with water; but there standeth one among you whom ye know not; &c.**

This answer of **John** admits the fact, but refers to no commission or special command to baptize with water. Verse 33, he adds, “ And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending and remaining on him, the same is He, which baptizeth

with the Holy Ghost. And I saw and bare record, that this is the Son of God.”

It may possibly be urged by some vehement advocates for water baptism, that in this last passage there appears to be an implication of authority to John. Doubtless he was warranted to make use of water as a sign or figure of real and saving Baptism, and consequently, in this identical passage immediately after the aforesaid implication, points to the great object of his ministry.

I see not how it can be possible for either Roman Catholics or Baptists, to make out a commission transferable to them from the 33rd verse above quoted.

Whatever that authority was, as respects Water Baptism, it was to John and not to them; because John has neither revealed nor transferred it to them.

As well might a Roman Priest, or Baptist minister tell us that a sign or figure of a ship is a ship, or that a portrait of a man is a man: Or that a Wafer by pretended transubstantiation is the real body of Christ; which we know would be palpable, self-evident falsehoods.

But was not our blessed Lord baptized of John in Jordan? I answer, he undoubtedly was. This admission on my part, necessarily leads me to advert to the circumstances connected with this memorable fact, as related by the Evangelist.

Matt. iii. 11. “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he

shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with Fire: whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his Wheat into the Garner; but he will burn up the Chaff with unquenchable Fire. Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee and comest thou to me?"

Let us mark every expression, this distinguished Herald in his official capacity, solemnly proclaimed on this occasion, that Christs, or Christian Baptism, should be with the Holy Ghost and with Fire.

No ambiguous, temporising expression of doubtful construction in this. No. A child, he that is least in the kingdom of God may comprehend the contrast, that fire does not mean water. No implication in this, that will admit of sprinkling the child's face with water, or immersion of the adult externally in that element as a substitute for regenerating the inner man.

But John forbad him. Instead of a special commission for water Baptism, here affirmed, behold we have a perfect and unqualified negative upon it.

John knew that the great object of his ministry being come, the sign was no longer necessary. Wherefore he makes a publick surrender to our blessed Lord, saying as above, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me.

"And Jesus answering said unto him, suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him.

And Jesus when he was baptized, went up straight-

way out of the water : and lo, the Heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting upon him : and lo, a voice from Heaven, saying, this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

This act of transcendent humility on the part of our blessed Lord, was therefore an act, not of commission, but of sufferance, and limited to the then present time, by the word *now*, in order to fulfil or finish that dispensation ; and accordingly immediate proclamation was made, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

Matt. v. 17. "Think not that I am come to destroy the Law or the Prophets : I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil." Agreeably to this gracious declaration, we find that our blessed Lord was circumcised the eighth day. Luke ii. 21. "And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called Jesus."

Will the advocates of water baptism in order to support their cause, assert, contrary to the plain sense of the New Testament, that all christians ought to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses? No.

Our blessed Lord previous to his passion, gives a full and very particular illustration of the proper use of water ; and a minute, or circumstantial detail of the manner of using it, which completely puts at rest all controversy of Roman Catholicks and baptists, relative to sprinkling and immersion.

John xiii. 3. "Jesus knowing that the Father had

given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God and went to God: He riseth from supper and laid aside his garments; and took a towel and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a basin, and began to wash his disciples feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.

So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments and was set down again, he said unto them, know ye what I have done unto you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye ought also to wash one another's feet: For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you."

The Roman Pontiff may therefore wash the feet of his Cardinals, and the Baptist Ministers may wash the feet of one another, or of their congregations. But is this their practice? No.

Whence do they derive their dispensing power?

The Pope has no authority to grant it.

Neither has he nor any other man, or number of men, authority to institute human inventions, or external ceremonies as substitutes in lieu of the internal, essential Baptism of the Son of God. Whose fan is in his hand, and we have reason to apprehend, that all superficial, fictitious, temporising, artificial subterfuges, will be but as chaff before the wind, or as fuel for the fire.

Finally, to return: John the Baptist, it appears, was baptized with the Holy Ghost at his birth.

Luke. i. 15. "He shall be filled with the Holy Ghost,

even from his mother's womb. But he never was baptized with water, that we have any account of. He was a Prophet, and more than a Prophet. He was an *experimental*, powerful Preacher of the renovating efficacy of the Baptism of Christ. He was the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord, as said the Prophet Esaias.

CHAPTER II.

A BRIEF ANALYSIS

OF THE

DOCTRINE OF BAPTISM.

A minister of the Baptist society having presented me with a pamphlet, entitled, “ A candid statement of the reasons which induce the Baptists to differ in opinion and practice from so many of their Christian Brethren, by John Ryland D. D.”

And as the minister requested me to give him my Notes upon it, I accordingly now present to him my views on the important subject of Christian Baptism.

I may further premise, that as the author has appealed, exclusively, to the doctrines and evidences contained in the New Testament, as the alone standard of decision. I shall not trouble him with the creed of any particular sect or party, but join issue with him in a mutual submission to the Tribunal of his own choice, the precepts of the Gospel.

Page 12. “ John Ryland asserts, that Christian Baptism is neither more nor less than an immersion of

the whole body in water, solemnly performed in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

And page 11. In proof of his assertion, he offers the following passage—Matt. xxviii. 18, 19, 20. “ All power is given unto me in Heaven and in Earth. Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you : and lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”

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Objections. 1st, Water Baptism is not Christian Baptism.

2nd, The passage, Matt. xxviii. 18. 19. 20. above quoted, in proof of the former, neither expresses nor implies water baptism.

3rd, Water Baptism never was administered by the apostles in the manner affirmed by John Ryland, viz. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

4th, Baptism, and Water Baptism, are two distinct things, having no other analogy to each other, than a figure, emblem, or portrait, has to things represented.

New Testament demonstrations of the foregoing Objections. viz.

1st, John the Baptist in his official capacity as the Herald of Christ, made a publick surrender of Water Baptism, as is shown in the former chapter—and on the same memorable occasion, John proclaimed in the spirit of prophecy, concerning his glorious successor,

Matt. iii. 11. "He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with Fire.

Language surely, could not comprise and convey a more discriminating contrast. Therefore I conclude, that this is of itself sufficient evidence to prove, that water baptism is not Christian Baptism.

2nd, Our blessed Lord gives an ample and incontrovertible illustration of Matt. xxviii. 18, 19, 20. which we find very particularly detailed by Luke, in the first Chapter of Acts, viz. verse 4, "And being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me, for John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost, not many days hence. 8, Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

This gracious communication of our blessed Lord, was made to his disciples, forty days after his resurrection, and immediately preceding his ascension.

It appears hardly possible, to conceive a more deeply interesting occasion, and of course, it ought to make an adequate impression on the minds of all who profess Christianity.

John Ryland will find in this illustration of our blessed Lord, no mixing of Baptism, with water Baptism: No hiding place for temporising ambiguity. John the Baptist and Water Baptism are here explicitly spoken of

by their proper names, and they are together placed in the back ground, by the past tense, as is proved by the text. And after having disposed of Water Baptism, he spoke next in due course, equally as distinctly of the Baptism of the Holy Ghost, in the future tense, which was to enable them to become his witnesses, and which they were to receive not many days hence.

Accordingly, we find this gracious promise was fulfilled; Acts ii. 1, 2, 3, 4. "And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance"

Will not any candid, rational man therefore acknowledge, that the baptism spoken of, Matt. xxviii. 18, 19, 20. was no other than the Baptism of the Holy Ghost; and that the illustration given by our blessed Lord, Acts i. is proof positive, of the highest authority, that it was so. But in order more fully to exemplify the fact, we have a remarkable demonstration while Peter was preaching at the house of Cornelius, Acts xi. 15, 16. "And as I began to speak, (says Peter) the Holy Ghost fell on them as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost."

But did not the apostles baptize with water after the day of Pentecost? I answer yes: but never in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Neither do we find any command of our blessed Lord in all the New Testament, for Water Baptism; nor do the apostles profess to have received any commission

for that purpose. The apostles also practised circumcision. The apostle Paul circumcised Timothy, because of the Jews. Some things he did by permission, and some by commission.

Acts xv. 1. "And certain men which came down from Judea taught the brethren, saying, except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, he cannot be saved.

When therefore, Paul and Barnabas had no small dissention and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the Apostles and Elders about this question."

In consequence of this appeal to the Church, it appears by the text, that a meeting was held, in which the subject was discussed; which resulted in a conclusion to send the following Letter by Judas and Silas, with Paul and Barnabas, viz.

"It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; That ye abstain from meats offered to Idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication : from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well."

This highly important document of the primitive Church at Jerusalem, therefore obviously excludes both circumcision and water baptism, notwithstanding any acts of individuals to the contrary.

The united judgment of the Church in their collective capacity, sanctioned by the Holy Ghost, must at

that time have been considered paramount to all other authority.

The apostle Paul who had successfully opposed Circumcision, tells us plainly, he was not sent to baptize. Corinth. i. 14, 15, 16, 17. " I thank God that I baptized none of you but Crispus and Gaius ; lest any should say that I baptized in mine own name, and I baptized also the household of Stephanas ; besides, I know not whether I baptized any other : For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the Gospel : not with wisdom of words, lest the Cross of Christ should be made of none effect."

CHRISTIAN BAPTISM, as contemplated and promulgated by the Gospel, is therefore no superficial, external act, but a supernatural, internal operation of the Son of God, by his Spirit in man ; which is sometimes represented by the similitude of fire in an oven, which burns inwardly, whereby the oven is prepared for its proper use and service.

If therefore Baptist ministers find that they are incompetent to the discharge of this interesting duty ; viz. To teach baptizing, as Peter did at the house of Cornelius ; and as he also taught in his general Epistle : I. Peter, vi. 10. 11. " As every man hath received the Gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold Grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the Oracles of God, if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth : that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ ; to whom be

praise and dominion for ever and ever—Amen. Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you.

Let them who profess to be gospel ministers, look well to their ordination, and not foolishly charge their incapacity to any supposed change in that dispensation, which, according to Matt. xxviii. 20, extends to the end of the world.

To mix water with baptism, as an ordinance in the Church, would be, as I apprehend, to attempt an unwarrantable and bold innovation upon the Prerogative of our Saviour.

Simon the Sorcerer believed, and was baptized with water; Acts viii. 13. "Then Simon himself believed also; and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done. And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, saying, give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither lot nor part in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore, of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity."

Water Baptism had done but little for him.

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But the ordination of Ministers of the Gospel according to Christ's rule, is no doubtful, equivocal, or superficial matter : Acts i. 8. " Ye *shall* receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you : and ye *shall* be witnesses unto me, said our blessed Lord to his disciples.

CHRISTIAN LAYMAN.

Burlington County, N. J.
December 25th 1820.

